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## Human Stories Make Global Warming Real

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I had no idea where the Tuvalu was. But the tiny nation in the South Pacific caught my attention — and everyone else's — early in the UN climate summit in Copenhagen by insisting on changes that temporarily brought the entire process to a halt.

Among its demands, Tuvalu wanted assurance that any new agreement slashed greenhouse gas emissions far and fast enough to keep global temperatures from rising no more than 2.7 degrees Fahrenheit.

More than half of the nations of the world joined Tuvalu in calling for the 2.7 degrees Fahrenheit limit. These nations also want the Kyoto Protocol, which the U.S. did not sign and which does not ensure major emission cuts from large emitters like China and India, to remain in effect while a new parallel agreement is also developed that includes those nations. These and other disagreements have made for rocky times at the summit.

I was keen to learn why a nation with just 10,000 people would take on big boys, so I asked Gillian Le Gallie, President of the Alofa Tuvalu Foundation. She showed me a video of seawater literally bubbling up through the ground.

"Rising sea levels and more persistent droughts are forcing our people to flee our nation," she told me. "Flooding is getting worse and during high tides the ocean now covers our main highway. It also causes pig manure to spread, polluting our land."

Drinking water is also becoming scarce. "We get our freshwater by capturing rainwater," Le Gallie said. "But we are getting longer periods of drought and water shortages."

Given these risks, I wondered what she thought about the U.S. proposal to cut emissions by 17 percent by 2020 based on 2005 levels.

"We like President Obama," she said. "But his proposal does not keep temperature increases below 1.5 degrees Celsius [2.7 degrees Fahrenheit], which is the maximum for us to survive. For us it's really a question of life and death."

The U.S. proposal and that of other developed nations aim to limit temperatures increases to 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit. Scientists say, however, that when temperatures rise that high the impacts on nations such as Tuvalu will be catastrophic and extreme climate change becomes increasingly possible.

While Tuvalu is being drowned by seawater, Nigeria, a heavily populated nation in western Africa is being parched by drought. I was lucky to stop by the Nigerian delegation's office when Senator Bassey Ewa Henshaw, Chairman of the Nigerian Senate Committee on Water Resources walked in. He kindly spoke with me for 20 minutes.

"We are experiencing very unusual and severe drought" that cause rivers to dry up, he said. "Water volume in our major rivers is down to one quarter of what it was."

The result has been desertification in the north and massive erosion in the south.

"The farmers in the north are not finding enough water. The government has built food storage facilities and so far we have not seen shortages. But we don't know how long this will continue."

"In the south the lands are more arid and big storms are destroying the roads and infrastructure, knocking down trees, and causing severe erosion."

In response to a question about the U.S. proposal, Senator Ewa Henshaw told me, "From the perspective of the least developed nations, we want assurances that temperature rises will not go beyond 1 to 1.5 degrees Celsius. Two degrees Celsius [3.6 degrees Fahrenheit] is too high because of its impacts."

Drought is also affecting India. But so is too much rain at the wrong time according to Nafisa Giga Dsouza, convener of the Indian Network on Ethics and Climate Change. Her group works at the grassroots level to help communities in India adopt effective responses to climate change.

"In India we are seeing the rainfall patterns change and that affects farmers," she told me. "Seventy percent of India is rural so farmers are very important. But now when it is supposed to rain it doesn't and when it is not supposed to rain it does. This makes it hard to farm."

India is already experiencing food shortages, "and the problem is made worse by drought."

Giga Dsouza was very unhappy with the U.S.

"Obama's 17 percent proposal is terrible, unfathomable, it does not make sense," she said. "Does he not understand what is happening to us?"

These stories show that global warming is not merely a future problem projected by computer models. It is happening right now throughout the world and it has serious consequences.

Perhaps the most poignant comment for Oregonians came from Gillian Le Gallie of Tuvalu.

"We are the symbol of what will happen to other places," she said. "Beware, if we can't get what we need to survive then all other people are at risk."

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